

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. HENRY LABOUCHERE,

ON THE PRESSURE OF

THE CORN LAWS

AND

SLIDING SCALE,

MORE ESPECIALLY UPON THE

MANUFACTURING INTERESTS

AND

PRODUCTIVE CLASSES.

BY

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A LETTER,

&c.

SIR,

I ENDEAVOURED to show, on a late occasion, in the House of Commons, when the Budget was under discussion, that, whilst the revenue depended upon the general consumption of articles paying duties and excise, the power of the people to consume such articles depended upon *their facility of procuring the necessaries of life*, and that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had most wisely connected an alteration of the Corn Laws, by which the supply of food is artificially restricted, with his proposed alteration of the sugar duties.

It was my intention, in the course of the expected debate upon the Corn Laws, the modification of which may be termed the second part of the Budget, to have

availed myself of that opportunity of urging some reasons in favour of such a modification, as appeared to me, either to have escaped observation, or not to have been duly commented upon. As the result, however, of the late division in the House of Commons, on Sir Robert Peel's motion, precludes me from doing so, I take the liberty of addressing to you, sir, as briefly as I can, an outline of those views and impressions.

And I must begin by expressing my strong and increasing conviction, that no efforts of enlightened legislation, no revision of import duties, nor, indeed, any extent of christian charity, can materially, or permanently, benefit the great body of the people, *whilst the supply of their food continues to be artificially limited*,—limited as it now is by the operation of our Corn Laws.

In ordinary seasons we are confined to the supply of food, which happens to be furnished by the United Kingdom. If the quantity produced be *abundant*, and *I measure that abundance by a comparison of prices here with those of other countries*, all classes of the community flourish, and the revenue likewise flourishes, under the genial influence of an ample supply of food, showing what would be the condition of the country, were it secured, as it might be, a continued abundance. But, *excepting in seasons of extraordinary production*, we are kept in a condition *bordering upon scarcity*; and in periods of absolute famine only, is the quantity of food increased by importations

from abroad, and an attempt made, though by clumsy and mischievous machinery, (as I will presently prove) to let us down again, as it were, to our ordinary state—that of scarcity. If asked, *why I call our ordinary condition, one of scarcity*, I reply, that the simple fact of the price of food being, ordinarily, 50 to 100 per cent. higher in this, than in adjacent countries, is a proof of deficient supply,—that is, of the existence of scarcity.

Now, sir, my impression is this, whilst the labourer is insufficiently supplied with food, he will take his wages, and any increase which may be made to his wages, to the food market, and endeavour to procure a larger portion. *His fellow-labourers will do the same, and the price of food will thus be raised by competition.* The labourers, however, will not obtain more food ; but the whole amount of their earnings will find its way into the pocket of the farmer, first, and, ultimately, of the landowner. *No part will find its way into the exchequer, nor one additional loaf into their hungry stomachs.*

This seems to me sufficiently evident. It is true, that when the price attains an extreme limit, importations of food from abroad are permitted. But, then, the *quantity is increased* ; and the condition necessary, as I maintain, to any improvement of their state, is fulfilled. But what, I would ask, must be the situation of the labouring classes, particularly of the manufacturing classes ; and what the situation of the

revenue, when food attains this famine price !! No one, I should think, can contemplate a permanent price of 73s. a quarter for wheat. If so, our permanent situation would be one, *not of scarcity, but of absolute famine.*

And, further, what more can CHARITY effect, under a limitation of food, than take a loaf from one who would have had and *might* have paid for it, to give it to another, who happens to be nearer at hand, or more an object of regard ?

If, indeed, charity could *rescue a single loaf from the consumption of the wealthier classes*, then she might feed one man without stinting another ; but charity cannot effect this,—she can only deduct from the common stock to give to some favoured individual.

The same thing occurs, on a larger scale, with the *legal provision for the poor*. The poor-rates are employed in deducting a still larger amount from the stock of food, (not the general stock, but only the *balance remaining* after the wealthier classes have supplied themselves,) out of which the independent labourer has to supply himself, and thus, whilst feeding the pauper, they tend to reduce to pauperism, an additional number of the independent poor. I cannot see how this can be otherwise, so long as *the quantity of food is artificially limited*. If the money raised for the relief of the poor, *were expended in the purchase of foreign food*, then the quantity of food would be increased, and the pauper

might be fed, without reducing the fund out of which the poor must draw their maintenance.

But I wish, more particularly, to draw your attention to the fact that, under the present system of *limiting our supply of food to the growth of the United Kingdom, we compel the productive classes to exchange the proceeds of their industry, however great, however rapidly increasing, with the proceeds of the land, however small these may be, or, however slowly increasing.* For population, capital, and manufactures, have a tendency to increase, and do, in fact, increase, much more rapidly than the products of the land, more especially where all the good land has, long since, been under cultivation. *The operation, therefore, of the monopoly enjoyed by the landowner is to draw to himself continually, a larger and larger portion of the industry of every other class of society.*

To make this hardship, imposed upon all other classes by the monopoly of the landowner, more intelligible, I will endeavour to put the case in another form.

A certain countryman, as we read in the fable, had a cow, which was gored by the bull of a neighbouring justice. The countryman applied to the justice for redress; but fearing that so interested a judge might not give a righteous judgment, he resorted to the following stratagem:—*he reversed the facts of the case, and stated that his own unlucky bull had gored and killed his worship's cow.* Having thus entrapped the unwary justice into an equitable deci-

sion, he then stated the *real* facts; on hearing which, as the story goes, the justice said this made so material a difference in the case, that he must take time to consider of it.

Feeling somewhat in the position of my friend the countryman, and fearing that the powerful and interested tribunal before which we have to plead, may be indisposed to give a favourable hearing to our cause, I shall have recourse to a similar expedient, and shall *reverse the respective position of the two great interests*,—the productive classes generally, and the landowners,—and, if I fail of entrapping these latter gentlemen into a sudden decision in our favour, I shall, *to indifferent judges at least*, make the relative position of the two parties more thoroughly understood.

The individual is now alive who set up the first steam-engine, to turn machinery. Before this time, all the machinery in mills was turned by water. Now, suppose this improvement in the steam-engine had never been effected, *all our mills must then have been turned by water*, as, in fact, they were, during the early stages of the cotton manufacture. But *water power being limited in amount*, THE MILLS TURNED BY IT *would, in the case supposed, have possessed a monopoly of MANUFACTURING for the entire population, as the LAND now enjoys a monopoly of FEEDING the same population*. In other words, instead of the quantity of food being limited, as it now is, the quantity of *clothing would have been limited*.

Let us now suppose, farther, that whilst the supply of clothing was thus limited, the supply of food was unlimited, or might be indefinitely supplied, that England, in fact, instead of being a *small* island, had been a *large* one, or a continent.

This is merely supposing the producers of clothing and the producers of food to change their relative positions, and that the former enjoyed the monopoly now actually possessed by the latter.

What will now be the course of things ?

At first, the interchange of food and clothing would probably be in equivalent quantities,—say a day's labour of the one, for a day's labour of the other ; but, by and bye, the corn growers increasing in numbers, require more clothing for themselves and families, they therefore cultivate more land, and take the produce of it to purchase more clothing from the mill-owners. But *the quantity of clothing being limited, they obtain in exchange for the increased quantity of food which they take to market, only the same number of pieces of woollen and of cotton goods.*

Their wants continuing to increase, they cultivate more land, invent new implements, work harder, and, in the eagerness of competition, every one tries to produce more corn and cheaper than his neighbour. But in vain ; they take their additional produce to the mill-owners, and receive in exchange for their additional exertions and ingenuity, *only the same number of pieces of woollens and of cottons.*

They now export their corn to foreign countries,

and bring back, in exchange, sugar, and coffee, and tea, and gold, and precious stones, and finally, they ransack the wide world for every luxury and every rarity, and offer all to the mill-owners, hoping, of course, *but, of course, hoping in vain*, to procure a larger portion of what the mill-owners produce.

Now this state of things implies gross injustice and great hardship, *but what I have described is only half the injustice.*

In the countries, to which these unhappy corn-growers export their surplus corn, clothing is cheap, and woollen and cotton cloths may be purchased at half the price which must be paid for them at home. But the *mill-owners have become so rich and powerful*, through the long enjoyment of this monopoly, (I will not call it by a harsher name,) that they are become *sole legislators*, and will allow *none but mill-owners* or those having some share, at least, in the mills,—that is, in the monopoly,—to sit in Parliament, and to make the laws. And one of the laws they make is, that no corn-grower, or exporter of food, shall be permitted to bring home any of the cheap clothing which might be bought in the countries to which they export their corn, so that no one can have any clothing, but the dear clothing, produced in their own mills.

When the poor corn-growers, by millions, petition this parliament of mill-owners for an alteration of these unjust laws, their prayers are neglected or derided, their distress denied, *and the enormous and*

increasing quantity of corn which they export, is yearly thrown in their teeth as proofs of their prosperity.

I am not exaggerating, I am not mis-stating, I am simply *reversing facts*, merely supposing one great interest and party in the nation, to be placed in the position actually occupied by the other; and can any one say that the condition of the corn-grower, such as I have described it, would not be one of great inequality, great hardship, and great oppression? When I say that I am not exaggerating anything, I forget that, under certain circumstances, the mill-owners *do* permit the introduction of foreign clothing. When the winter is extremely severe, and the temperature of the air has ranged below the freezing point for six successive weeks, *then*, great-coats and blankets, of foreign manufacture, are admitted for home consumption. But, when the six weeks' average temperature rises a few degrees, such heavy duties are imposed upon these indispensable articles, that the further importation of them becomes impossible.

To bring this parallel to a close. After long suffering, the tillers of the soil begin to perceive the actual position in which they are placed,—that all their exertions have gone to increase the wealth and power of the mill-owners,—and that all their future labours will only promote the same result;—that, as their numbers increase, they must work the harder, and go more naked into the bargain. They grow irritable, sulky, and dangerous; they

associate, organise, discuss their grievances, and send out missionaries to communicate to others the cause of their common evil, and concert with them the means of redress.

In short, sir, *they, the corn-growers do, what the manufacturers are now doing,—they struggle to get quit of a cruel and iniquitous burden.*

A further proof, I think, of the unequal game which the productive industry of the country is compelled to play with the landowner, may be found *in the continually increasing discrepancy between the official and declared (or real,) value of our exports, that is, between the quantity and value of them.*

I request your attention to the following tables :—

No. 1. The official and declared value of exports of British and Irish manufactures and produce from 1841, to the present time.

No. 2. The same, made out into averages of five years.

No. 3. The official and declared value of Cotton goods exported, for the last ten years, from 1831 to 1840.

No. I.

Years.	Exports of British and Irish Produce and Manufactures.	
	Official Value.	Real, or Declared Value.
1814	34,207,253	45,494,219
1815	42,875,996	51,603,028
1816	35,717,070	41,657,873
1817	40,111,427	41,761,132
1818	42,700,521	46,603,249
1819	33,534,176	35,208,321
1820	38,395,625	36,424,652
1821	40,831,744	36,659,630
1822	44,236,533	36,968,964
1823	43,804,372	35,458,048
1824	48,735,551	38,396,300
1825	47,166,020	38,877,388
1826	40,965,735	31,536,723
1827	52,219,080	37,181,335
1828	52,797,455	36,812,756
1829	56,213,041	35,842,623
1830	61,140,864	38,271,597
1831	60,683,933	37,164,372
1832	65,026,702	36,450,594
1833	69,989,339	39,667,347
1834	73,831,550	41,649,191
1835	78,376,731	47,372,270
1836	85,229,837	53,368,571
1837	72,548,047	42,214,938
1838	92,459,231	50,060,970
1839	97,402,726	53,233,580
1840	102,705,372	51,406,430

You will here observe, that in 1819, the year when our currency, and prices generally, began to assume a fair value and settled appearance, the *official value* of our exports amounted to only £33,534,176. ; being actually less than the *real value* by £1,674,145.

Whilst in 1840, the official value had risen to £102,705,372. and the real value only to £51,406,430. showing an increase of £69,171,196. in the official, and only £16,118,109. in the real value, or a rise of above 300 per cent. in the one, to less than 50 per cent. in the other.*

No. 2.

Exports of British and Irish Produce and Manufactures, for averages of Five Years.			
Years.		Official value.	Real or declared value.
1814 to 1818	5 years' average.	39,122,453	45,278,012
1819 „ 1823	„	40,160,490	36,073,306
1824 „ 1828	„	48,376,808	36,434,718
1829 „ 1833	„	62,610,776	37,150,887
1834 „ 1840	7 „	86,079,070	48,370,525

* In estimating the amount of increase, both in the official and real values, the very large quantity and value of *foreign raw material*, should not be forgotten; for example, the real value of our exports, (though called exports of the manufactures and produce of the United Kingdom,) includes a sum of £3 or 4,000,000. sterling, paid for raw cotton alone, in 1840, more than was paid for the raw cotton included in our exports of 1819, as well as large additional sums for wool, raw silk, drugs, and many other articles, so that the increase indicated by our list of exports, is not really an increase to that amount of British produce, labour, and capital.

I may also remark at the same time, though incidentally, and not as affecting my present argument, that a very rapid increase in the spinning of coarse cotton yarn for export, (by which a pound of foreign cotton costing 6*d.*, has a value of only 3*d.* or 4*d.* per lb. added to it, but which adds 9*d.* or 10*d.* for every pound, to the quantity and value of our list of exports,) gives an appearance of a *rapid pro-*

It may be here observed, that the first five years' average should be thrown altogether out of account, owing to the war prices, still current, and a deranged currency, otherwise, after deducting the extra sums paid for raw materials, &c., to foreign countries, during the last seven years, beyond what was paid for the same during the first five years, from 1814 to 1819, the real value of our exports would show *no increase, during the whole period of twenty-five years.*

It must, however, be regarded as very remarkable, that the real value of our exports for fifteen years, viz. from 1819 to 1833, continued to average almost precisely the same amount, whilst, during the same period, the official value had increased 50 per cent.

During this time, it is true, that great improvements were taking place in all branches of our manufactures; machinery was quickened, and labour was economised; but wages were also declining, and the profits of capital suffering a material reduction. Our exports, too, began to change their character, becoming more and more the produce of machinery, and less and less the produce of simple labour, in which latter branch of industry, foreign competition began most seriously to interfere. But the discrepancy between the official and real value of our exports, during the last seven years, amounts, on an average, to nearly 100 per

gressive increase to our exports of cotton manufactures, whilst, comparatively, a trifling increase only of the exports of British labour and capital is actually taking place.

cent., and each successive year of the seven still farther widens the difference. During the last four years, this difference has been made up out of wages and capital, and the remuneration of both, been diminished by the amount indicated by this difference.

No. 3.

Exports of Cotton Manufactured Goods for the last ten years.		
Years.	Official Value.	Real, or Declared Value.
1831	35,661,380	15,294,942
1832	33,903,118	13,284,036
1833	37,206,480	12,675,622
1834	40,133,343	13,782,375
1835	44,266,902	15,302,571
1836	44,933,399	16,421,745
1837	50,733,587	18,511,692
1838	41,918,547	13,640,181
1839	54,610,501	16,715,856
1840	58,516,096	17,692,183

Here we perceive that, during the last ten years, the official value of cotton goods exported has increased by £22,854,716., whilst the real value has increased only by £2,397,241. From this latter sum, may be deducted the value of 80,000,000lbs. of raw cotton, worth about £1,600,000., and perhaps, about £400,000. worth of drugs, &c., worked up into these goods, making together a sum of £2,000,000. paid to foreign countries, more than

was paid for the same articles in 1831, leaving little more than half a million sterling of real value, to set against an increase of £20,000,000.(deducting the additional raw material) of official value. This vast deficiency in value in 1840, compared with 1831, has also fallen, almost exclusively, upon labour and capital,—that is, on wages and profits.

Now, Sir, I do not mean to assert, that there is an *immediate* connection between this discrepancy in the official and real value of our exports, and the disastrous condition of our manufactures during the last four years.

I attribute much of that distress to the undue increase of our manufactures, during the plethora of money and credit in 1835 and 1836; followed, as it unfortunately was, by pecuniary embarrassment in America, in 1837, and a diminished means of consumption at home, from the high price of food. The difficulties of the Bank, arising from a drain of bullion, increased the mischief. It may, however, be urged, with truth, on the other hand, that America would have recovered from her embarrassment at a much earlier period, the price of food have ruled lower at home, and the drain of bullion been trifling, had it not been for our Corn Laws.

But the observation I would make upon this discrepancy, *this continually diminishing* VALUE *of our exports compared with the* QUANTITY *of them*, is, that it cannot be attributed, of late years, in any material degree, to a reduced cost of produc-

tion, but principally to a reduced remuneration of labour and of capital. It is a circumstance which has not attracted the attention it deserves ; and its origin must be sought for in the fact, that whatever the non-agricultural productive classes create, beyond their own consumption, has to be exchanged in one shape, or another, directly or indirectly, immediately or remotely, against the same fixed quantity of food, namely, that furnished by the United Kingdom. One half of our manufactures is at once exchanged for food, the other half is exported ; but finally, in the shape of imports, this comes also to be exchanged for food, like the first half.

Thus, a given number of quarters of wheat (supposing all agricultural produce to resolve itself into wheat) are exchanged with the sum total of the productions of all other classes, and this number of quarters becomes the *measure of value*, as it were, of these productions. The number of quarters, however, is limited, or increases but slowly, whilst the productions of industry and capital, arising otherwise than from land, increase more rapidly, and thus a continually larger and larger portion of the latter, comes to be exchanged with the same, or nearly the same, quantity of the former.

Or, as I stated before, the *tendency of a monopoly in the land is to draw continually to itself, a larger and larger portion of the industry of every other class.*

PART II.

SIR,—Having, in the previous part of my letter, endeavoured to explain the working of an *artificial limitation of food* upon the people generally, and the peculiar hardship imposed thereby upon the productive classes, not immediately employed in agriculture I will quit this part of the subject, with a popular illustration of the consequences of a deficient supply of an article, necessary to existence.

It may be recollected that, once upon a time, a certain number of our countrymen were shut up in a place, which has since been named the *Black Hole of Calcutta*, in a space, so small in proportion to their numbers, that the supply of *air* proved insufficient for those confined in it.

Nature required an ampler supply than could find its way through one narrow aperture; they gasped for breath, and earnestly pleaded for air.

It was not that they were not rich enough to pur-

chase that, for the want of which they were perishing ; they were men of rank and wealth. It was not that the article was scarce, or distant, or of difficult attainment ; it was close at hand, as well as spread far and wide through the whole creation. Wherefore, then, could they not attain the object of their desire ? Why did the weak sink, in a fruitless struggle with the strong ? *Why did so many of our fellow-creatures and fellow-countrymen, perish in the midst of surrounding abundance ?*

Because the avenue was closed, and access denied to what alone could relieve their distress, and preserve their lives from destruction.

Now, this Island is a small space, compared with the number of inhabitants confined within its limits ; the supply of food is insufficient for these numbers ; food is what they require, and nothing can be given as a substitute for food ; without food they perish, without a sufficient supply of food they languish, and no relief can be afforded, *but by increasing the quantity to be divided amongst them.* It is not that they are not rich enough to purchase food ; their industry, ingenuity, and mineral treasures, give them unlimited means of purchase ; the food they require is spread around, almost as abundant as the air they breathe. Why, then, are they condemned to struggle with each other for a larger portion of an insufficient supply ? What prevents them from obtaining instant and effectual re-

lief? A barrier has been erected by the owners of the soil, and the bounty of Providence shut out.

I am not aware, Sir, whether your attention has ever been directed to the great pecuniary loss, which attends the purchase of foreign corn, under the present SLIDING SCALE,—a loss, resulting solely from its uncertain action, unconnected with the amount of protection to the land-owner, or the quantity of corn imported.

I believe that no return of the quantities of each description of grain, imported for home consumption, during the last three years, has yet been laid before parliament; but this, so far as my argument is concerned, is of no importance, the loss I allude to, being in proportion to the quantity, whatever that may be. I shall, therefore, assume as correct, the quotations of Mr. Leatham of Wakefield,* which, he says, he received from a large corn-dealer in London.

According to this authority, the importation which took place in little more than eighteen months, did not amount to less than 10,380,267 quarters of grain, of all descriptions, namely—

End of	1838. . . .	1,534,730	quarters.
„	1839. . . .	4,657,146	„
Six months	1840. . . .	4,188,391	„
		<hr/>	
		10,380,267	
		<hr/>	

* Letters on the Currency, Second Series.

The smallest cost of which must have been,

Say, 7,000,000	qrs. Wheat at 50s...	£17,500,000	
1,200,000	„ Barley		} 20s. 3,380,000
1,360,000	„ Oats		
820,000	„ Beans, Peas		
<hr/>		10,380,267	
			<hr/> £20,880,000

Now, it must be remarked, in the first place, that we paid for these 10,380,267 of quarters, at least, 15s. too much for wheat, and 5s. too much for the other kinds of grain : that is, in round numbers,

15s. × 7,000,000 quarters	=	£5,250,000
5s. × 3,380,267 „	=	845,000
		<hr/> £6,095,000

But for the *operation of the sliding scale*, which opens the ports only occasionally, for short periods, and under risk of ruin to importers, (ruin, if they buy *too soon*, and have to warehouse for years, ruin if they buy *too late*, and, on arrival, find prices down and duties up,) all this quantity of corn instead of being bought suddenly, in near markets, and at high prices, would have been bought *in many markets, at various times, and at low prices*, and this enormous sum of above £6,000,000, been saved to the nation. *It has been entirely thrown away, or made a free gift to foreigners.* What should we think of a law, framed for the avowed purpose of, taking from us £6,000,000, to

give absolutely for nothing, to foreigners? What must we say of a law *which has actually done this, and which necessarily entails a frequent repetition of such a sacrifice?*

This national sacrifice, constantly to be repeated, whenever we import foreign grain, is entirely owing to the operation of the *sliding scale*; it has nothing to do with securing high prices to the agriculturist; not one quarter of wheat, more or less, is introduced into consumption: it is a simple, gratuitous robbery of the national property, for which ignorance alone can be pleaded in excuse.

It may be remarked, in the second place, that the sudden demand (a suddenness arising, as before stated, *from the operation of the sliding scale*,) for an article, not of regular commercial exchange, like corn, and which has to be *suddenly bought, shipped, and paid for*, must be accompanied by payments in BULLION. Whereas, under a system of free trade, or fixed duty, purchases being regularly made in all markets, where prices were low, every quarter would be *paid for in manufactured goods, or British produce*, and thus, the manufacturing interests would be benefitted, and, through them, the agricultural interest also.

Instead, however, of being paid for in manufactures, our imports of foreign grain are all, or nearly all, paid for in *bullion*.

The mischievous effect of this sudden demand for

bullion on the commerce and manufactures of the country, is but too well known.

The Bank finds itself in danger of suspension ; it refuses the usual accommodation, curtails discounts, and commerce becomes deranged at home and abroad. Prices are acted upon to such a degree, that the most prudent adventures have ruinous issues, men are stripped of their capital, the manufacturing population is thrown out of work, and the evil of a high price of provisions is further aggravated by a diminished demand for labour.

This mischief, like the former, is entirely owing to the *sliding scale*, and would be avoided by the substitution of a *fixed duty*. The pressure upon commerce and manufactures, as well as the extra price paid for foreign corn, is perfectly gratuitous. Were it simple robbery, the mere taking money out of one man's pocket to put into the pocket of another, taking from the manufacturer to give to the landowner, or taking from both to give to the West India proprietor, something might be said in its favour ; but it is pure national loss, and unadulterated folly.

Even the agriculturists themselves do not escape unhurt ; for their produce falls in price with the general decline which accompanies a reduction of the currency, and it falls still farther, from the diminished means of consumption of the manufacturing population.

What I have described, however, is not the extent

of the loss entailed upon the nation by a purchase of foreign corn, under the sliding scale.

The Bank, in order to restore exchanges and check the drain of bullion, is compelled to reduce the circulation, in order to act upon prices, *which decline in consequence, from 5, to 20 per cent, as the case may be.*

Now, as our exports amount to 50 millions *per annum*, a decline of, say 10 per cent. in prices, enables foreign nations to purchase these identical exports, *with 45 millions, for which, had this decline not occurred, they would have paid us 50 millions.* In two years, therefore, they pay us, at this rate, a sum of 10 millions less, than they would otherwise have paid us, for the identical goods. This fact agrees perfectly with what we have observed, as to the discrepancy between the quantity and value of our exports. We have seen in the *great additional quantity* of our exports and the *small additional value* of them, how little foreign nations have paid us the last three years, compared with what they should have paid us.

We have, then, in the first place, paid upwards of £6,000,000 for the corn imported in the last two or three years, more than it was actually worth, or, than we need to have paid for it; and we have, in the second place, sold our manufactures and produce for £10,000,000 less than they were worth, and less than we should have obtained for them, but for the Sliding Scale.

In little more than two years, we have actually paid to foreigners, £30,880,000 for 10,380,000 quarters

of corn, intrinsically worth only £14,785,000, or thrown away some £16,000,000, as completely, as if we had cast it into the German Ocean. So great is the national loss, arising from our present mode of purchasing foreign corn,—so great is the loss arising from the mode of paying for it,—so great is the derangement of all commercial transactions, that I am seriously inclined to think, it would be less injurious to the nation to close the ports for ever, under every contingency, and leave it to struggle through its famines as it might, than to seek relief under such a system of Corn Laws. The struggle and the suffering might be more severe, but it would be of less duration, and be attended with less derangement, and damage to the national resources.

Having dwelt so long upon one evil arising from the *sliding scale* of the present Corn Laws, namely, the pecuniary loss to the nation, I shall not allude to other evils which are more obvious, and have been the subject of frequent comment. All the peculiar mischiefs of a sliding scale would, of course, be avoided by the imposition in lieu of it, of a fixed duty; and, considering the measure proposed by the Government a decided improvement in the mode of taxing food, if food must be taxed, my humble endeavours shall not be wanting to its success.

I must, however, express my strong conviction of the *impolicy and injustice of any artificial contrivance, direct or indirect, for enhancing the price of food.*

If any wheat be imported, even under a system of perfectly free trade, it would prove that wheat was ten shillings per quarter, or 25 to 30 per cent. higher in the country whence it came, perhaps a manufacturing rival, than at home. If any should be imported under a duty of 8s., it would prove, that wheat was 50, to 60 per cent. higher in that country, than at home.

Dependent as we are in a thousand ways, I will not pause to detail, upon an export trade of £50,000,000 per annum. an export, altogether contingent on our articles being produced at a cheaper rate than in any other country, what can be more impolitic than to raise still higher, by means of an import duty, the price of food, already so high compared with its price in other countries, and which must necessarily remain high, so long as we continue to import at all?

The simple fact of importing food, implies the existence of a tax on the people, in one shape or another, for their food, of £40,000,000, or £50,000,000 per annum; and this, in addition to the £50,000,000 of Government taxes, is surely burden enough to bear, without any farther taxation being imposed in the shape of a duty.

I feel perfectly confident that the export trade of this country must sink under such an accumulation of burdens.

When, however, I find that country gentlemen

and noble lords sneer at the proposed duty of 8s. per quarter, as affording no protection to the agricultural interest, and being “*an insult*,” I confess I am astonished. I would ask them, do they consider a protection *equal to the entire rent of the land*, as no protection? Yet 8s. per quarter of wheat, does amount, in fact, to the rent of land, whether the quality be good, or bad. Land of middling quality will yield 3 quarters of wheat to the acre, which, being multiplied by 8s. gives 24s. Land of good quality will yield 5 quarters to the acre, which, multiplied by 8s. gives 40s. ; and these sums will be found to represent the rent, paid for the respective qualities of land.

But, if, to the 8s. duty, we add 8s. to 12s. more, for the cost of importing foreign wheat, we shall find that the home grower will enjoy a protection, *equal to twice the entire rent*. Now, surely, if our farmers had their farms rent free, they might contrive to maintain a competition with the foreigner ; but to say that they cannot do so, with a premium equal to the rent, in addition to having the land for nothing, is to condemn themselves for utter incompetency ; or, it proves, what is really the case, that they do not, in fact, understand what *is* the amount of protection offered to them.

Should the landed interest refuse the present terms, they will ultimately have to submit to others, less advantageous. The discussion now carrying on, if prolonged, can have but one result,

namely, a resolute refusal on the part of the nation to pay any tax on the food they have to import, beyond the necessary, but very heavy one, of bringing it some thousand miles, from the place of its growth; and the landowners show themselves unreasonable alike, in their expectations and their claims, when they demand a greater protection than is thus afforded.

Let the landowners state what they honestly believe to be the amount of protection they now enjoy—how many shillings per quarter of wheat? When they explicitly state this, which they have never yet done, we have only to multiply the sum by the number of quarters of wheat consumed, and to do the same in proportion, for other grain, to arrive at the amount of tax, which, in their opinion, is levied upon the people for *cereal crops* alone.

The landowners are in this dilemma. Either the price of corn is not raised by the Corn Laws, and if so, they need not fear foreign competition; or, it is raised, and the nation is taxed to support their monopoly.

If, as they sometimes urge, taxation presses upon land with unequal severity, their right is undoubted, and, it is also *unquestioned*, to a protection, equivalent to such inequality. Let the subject be thoroughly sifted, and ample allowance made, but let there be no plundering the nation under vague excuses, or imaginary claims, such as the payment of tithes, land tax, or highway rates. If the poor-rates, or charges for the administration

of justice, or any other charge whatsoever, can be shown to press unequally upon the land, I repeat, let ample allowance be made. In weighing such claims, however, the many taxes from which land is exempted, must also be taken into account, as also, that the expense of importing foreign corn, is in itself, a natural protection from foreign competition, equal to the entire rental of the land.

It will be found, on examination, that the *fears* of the landowners are as much without foundation, as are their claims to excessive protection.

It has been proved by official documents, over and over again, that the average price of wheat, at Dantzic, the port whence we derive our largest supplies, has ruled for a long series of years, at 33s. to 34s. per quarter; and at New York, at 40s. If to these we add 10s. expences of import and 8s. the proposed duty, we have 52s. and 58s. per quarter, as the price, *without profit to the importer*, at which, wheat, of good quality, can be laid down; whilst, in England, the price has not averaged above 56s. for the last ten years.

The alarm about land being thrown out of cultivation, should the measure of ministers be carried, is utterly without foundation. Land will become only too valuable; and landowners may be sure, that where the quantity of land is limited, and is small compared with the population, an active competition, will ever be kept up for their farms, a competition which cannot fail of keeping down farming profits and labourers' wages at a very low point, and of

throwing a larger share of both into their own pockets. They have, in fact, only one thing to fear, and that is, the decline of commerce and manufactures, and England becoming again, what she was, not very many years ago, an EXPORTER of agricultural produce, and which she will again become, if a material alteration be not quickly made in our Corn Laws.

But having no intention of enlarging upon the Corn Laws, to one so conversant with the subject as yourself, and merely wishing to draw your attention to one, or two peculiar evils, which seemed to me to have attracted less observation than they merited, I shall conclude this long letter by a few words in defence of the Anti-Corn-Law League, of which I had the honour to be one of the earliest founders.

The ANTI-CORN-LAW LEAGUE has been the subject, both in the House of Commons and out of it, of much animadversion and abuse ; but I have yet to learn, wherein consists the crime of disseminating knowledge upon a momentous question, and one upon which the deepest ignorance and misapprehension prevail ; or, how this information can be diffused, without an organisation for the purpose. Can there be a doubt upon the mind of any living man, that Catholic Emancipation was carried by a similar organisation ? Can there be a doubt that the abolition of the Slave Trade, and of slavery, owe their success to the same means ? Does any man, in his senses, believe that either of these great questions would

have been carried by this time, but for such an organisation? Does any man, in his senses, say, they ought not to have been carried?

Now, sir, without intending to depreciate the importance of either of these great questions, yet I must say, whether I regard *the numbers of my fellow creatures whose interests are at stake, or the urgency and justice of their claims*, that the Repeal of the Corn Laws is a question of superior magnitude.

I confidently look forward to the same successful issue of this question, which we have witnessed in the case of the other two. That a thousand lectures, delivered to crowded audiences in every part of the kingdom, and the circulation of two millions of pamphlets, have not been in vain, is proved by the formation of branch societies in every quarter, and by the petitions of 1,500,000 of people.

A million and a half of signatures, I repeat, were attached to petitions for an alteration of the Corn Laws during the last session of Parliament,—a greater number than were attached to all the petitions for and against every other subject, presented during the same session, including even those against an alteration of these laws; and a still greater number would have petitioned this session had it not prematurely terminated.

I do not mean to justify every expression, or argument, which may have been used by parties engaged in the agitation, but, that *the end proposed is one of transcendent importance*, and that the means are not

only innocent, *but that they are the only means competent to work out that end, I am fully prepared to maintain.*

I trust the League will be successful in its efforts, ere the good, which may still be derived from a repeal of the Corn Laws, shall have eluded our grasp, or, before it assume, as it certainly will assume, should the distress be of much longer continuance, an organization of a more formidable character, which will enforce attention and exact success. It is certain that more than one expedient will be attempted, before the manufacturing interests of this country will quietly witness the destruction of their capital, and starvation of the people.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

ROBERT HYDE GREG.

London, June 18, 1840.

